

BOOK REVIEWS

John Porter. *The Vertical Mosaic*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965. 626 pp. \$15.

For years Canadian sociologists have had to rely almost entirely on American sources to illustrate sociological theories. However, as Canada has many conditions similar to those of her neighbour to the South, and tends to follow — in due course — many of the same trends and fashions of that country, this has not hampered students in understanding the Canadian scene as much as might be expected. But, if it is true as many people claim, that there *are* certain differences between the two countries, it is high time we found out exactly what they are. Much soul-searching has gone on in this respect in the past years. For Canadians have been made even more “self” conscious by the Quiet Revolution and by the practical necessity of trying to find something uniquely Canadian to mark our Centenary. Even Expo '67 has made us search diligently into our somewhat flimsy historical past to pull together evidence that we *are* Canadians.

The Vertical Mosaic is the first factual study that has examined the broad sweep of Canadian society as it is today. It does not deal, as most Canadian histories and novels, with only our glamorous citizens, but tells us about the whole gamut of our population right down to the lowliest labourer. Only those who have tried to find data on living Canadians will be able to appreciate the tremendous amount of work that has gone into the painstaking task of finding, and then putting together, the thousands of bits of information that add up to the total picture. Thirty-two tables, twenty-five appendixes and eight figures help to sort out the mass of information into meaningful patterns.

The usefulness of Professor Porter's study does not lie in the fact that it reveals very much that perceptive Canadians did not already know — or guess — but in that it has documented insights with accurate data, and thus laid a badly needed basis for many types of research. It is a study that Canadians as well as sociologists can be proud of.

The Vertical Mosaic begins with a discussion of the Canadian social class structure — a realistic feature of our society that many Canadians have either ignored or thought of as a passing phase on our way to unlimited equality. The theoretical introduction is followed by figures that show how migration, ethnicity, income, rural residence and education are related to this phenomenon.

In Part 2, Porter is concerned with the structure of power and its relationship to economic position. He shows that power is concentrated in the hands of a relatively small proportion of the population and explains how organized labour and the labour elite fit into this hierarchy. Then he turns to the political elite, demonstrating how positions of power influence the mass media, higher learning, and the clergy. The last chapter illustrates the ways in which many Canadians now gain assistance in achieving positions of power through kinship and friendship ties. As in all societies, these help to maintain the cohesion and the position of those who have climbed — or were born — into the top ranks. The relative rigidity of these ranks can give us some idea of the degree to which any society is truly democratic.

Educationists will want to know the way in which education helps or hinders upward mobility. When Lloyd Warner and his associates brought out their provocative and perceptive study, *Who Shall be Educated*, in the 1940's, it was the first time that Americans were given concrete evidence that their vast country was not as "classless" as they had always fondly supposed. On the contrary, Warner reported that the school, the very institution Americans had imagined gave them all equal opportunity, was one of the main agencies that helped to sort them out into their different social class positions. Canadians have had to wait a long time for any substantive evidence that would tell them whether or not their own educational system functions in this way.

What determines "Who Shall Drop-out" of Canadian schools? Porter's study shows that the father's occupational rank has much bearing on this question and his statistics suggest that a great deal of rich potential ability in the lower income brackets is being wasted. The number of students who remain in Canadian schools is slowly increasing, but even in 1961, although 97.1% of the 10-14 age group was in school, only 58.5% of the 15-19 age group remained. The figures for college attendance are even more alarming for a country in an era of rapid industrialization. For, in 1961 only 11.3% of the young men and 4.6% of the young women between the ages of 20-24 were in college. Porter's detailed tables of the different rate for drop-outs in the various provinces, and a selected number of cities, will surely tempt more research on the background factors which motivate boys and girls to leave or stay at school in these different environments.

The relation of education to social position is supported in this study from another angle when Porter shows that a large proportion of the economic elite of Canada has had university training. Unlike earlier times when self-made men could scorn education, industry and commerce are now so specialized that they must seek their recruits from the university. However, a degree is not the only asset for top executive positions. Many personal characteristics as well are checked as young men move up in the

power hierarchy. Even though wives are perhaps not as carefully scrutinized in Canada as in the States when top positions must be filled, personal attributes — such as behaving in the “right” way, wearing the “right” clothes, and even the ability to talk with knowledge about the “right” sports — are all necessary adjuncts to a person’s career.

Where are these sometimes intangible ways of behaving learnt so that they become part of the personality of the middle and upper classes? in the home, if one is fortunate enough to be born into the “right” family; in the schoolroom, if one is fortunate enough to have parents who can afford an exclusive private school. Of the Canadian born elite named by Porter, 34.2% had gone to private schools — enough to perpetuate the type of school which will indoctrinate their own children with the kind of education, manners and outlook on life which will enable them to move easily into positions of power amongst the Canadian elite. The proportion who will attend private schools will probably be much higher in the next generation. Nor should it be overlooked that this training, and the all-important contacts with the right peer groups that it encourages, is reinforced by such means as private summer camps, and later by select university fraternities. Canada’s system of perpetuating those in power has never become as rigid as those of older European countries, but it still seems strong enough to assist the sons of the “Old Boys” to keep ahead of those who must depend on public education.

Porter does not agree with most sociologists that his function should be confined to observing and analyzing human behaviour. In fact, he states his own values in regard to the Vertical Mosaic quite clearly, and does not hesitate to comment on some of his findings. This is helpful to the person who wants to translate information into action. Indeed, there is enough in this book to stir those who are interested in Canada to thought and action for many years to come.

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